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WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM IN PROMOTING SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Statement submitted by the International Council on Social Welfare and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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* See E/1993/100.

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1. Both the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) 1/ and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) 2/ would like to affirm to the Economic and Social Council their wholehearted support for the upcoming World Summit for Social Development in 1995. Both organizations would like to stress their activity in accordance with the Guiding Principles for Developmental Social Welfare Policies and Programmes as stated by the United Nations, especially in promoting cooperation at all levels and in addressing the needs of different social groups.

2. In view of their interests and membership, both organizations have resolved that activities in relation to the Summit will be their major priority for 1993-1995. They would, therefore, like to assure the Economic and Social Council that they are prepared, through their members and partners, to contribute to the preparatory process at both the national and international levels.

3. ICSW and ICVA greatly welcome the opportunity which the Summit will provide for discussion of key issues relating to social integration, alleviation of poverty and expansion of productive employment. Both organizations will cooperate in forwarding the core issues of the Summit within a framework citing the need for:

Putting people first;

More cooperation, better social policies and better strategies for participation;

Global strategies to advance social well-being;

Economic development and social justice as a means to human development;

Establishing balanced interaction between State, market and social development;

Paying special attention to the problems of marginalized and disadvantaged groups;

Promoting progress on legal protection, social welfare, education, training and social security structures;

Mobilizing resources for social development and action within the United Nations system.

4. However, both ICSW and ICVA would like to stress that they take a very strong stand on the second point and would like to call for the eradication of poverty rather for its mere alleviation and reduction.

5. Both ICSW and ICVA will encourage their members to closely monitor and participate in national preparations for the Summit. They encourage strong representation of non-governmental organizations, in national delegations, in the belief that, especially in social affairs, the voluntary sector is often more involved and competent to speak on certain issues (such as service provision) than are other sectors. They feel input from non-governmental organizations to be vital for addressing the core Summit issues.

6. Therefore, ICSW and ICVA would like the Economic and Social Council to expressly urge the encouragement and facilitation of non-governmental involvement in the Summit process. This would include funds earmarked to ensure the involvement particularly of developing country non-governmental organizations in Summit-related activities.

7. In order to better involve and prepare non-governmental organizations for the World Summit, both ICSW and ICVA are organizing a broad range of activities in relation to it:

(a) The organizations' various newsletters and reports have already begun to disseminate information on the Summit to the non-governmental organization network;

(b) ICSW and ICVA will prepare briefing documents to orient non-governmental organizations regarding the core issues to be approached at the Summit and to aid in enhancing their involvement therein;

(c) Five regional meetings will be held prior to the Summit to enable non-governmental organizations in those regions to express and advocate their concerns regarding Summit input;

(d) The ICSW International Conference of Social Welfare in July 1994 will be on the theme of "Global Welfare 94: The Fight Against Poverty and Inequality on a World Level". It will serve as the ICSW preparatory meeting for the 1995 Summit, thus focusing the attention of ICSW members - an international social policy organization made up primarily of the voluntary sector - as a community seeking ways to better cooperate with other sectors in the common goal of fighting to eradicate poverty and inequality;

(e) Immediately following the above conference, an NGO Forum will be organized as a global non-governmental preparatory meeting for the Summit.

8. ICSW and ICVA take a very broad view of basic human rights to include political, civil, social, economic and cultural rights, seeing all of these as inextricably interdependent and indivisible.

9. Both ICSW and ICVA acknowledge that the social status assigned to certain identifiable groups excludes many people from the benefits of advances in social development. ICSW and ICVA campaign vigorously for the full recognition, avid defence and active promotion of basic human rights for everyone. It is their belief that social development is achievable only if poverty and marginality - along with their causes - are eradicated, equal access to resources guaranteed and cultural differences respected.

10. ICSW and ICVA acknowledge the validity and significance of the chosen core issues. They acknowledge their close interrelated nature: poverty leads to marginalization and vice versa, and the expansion of productive employment can be seen as the solution to both. A constructive and holistic approach to all three issues would go far in solving the major social problems ensuing from the negative consequences of being poor, alienated and cut off from constructive activity.

11. ICSW and ICVA would like to explicitly affirm their support for the United Nations General Assembly resolution that the Summit should express a "shared world-wide commitment to put the needs of people at the centre of development". They agree and promote the interface between human rights and development, and between national and international action, in the certainty that only positive consequences can ensue from constructive action in such directions.

12. Acknowledging the consequences occurring when population growth takes place under conditions of economic recession, ICSW and ICVA support sound social and economic policies to provide a secure "safety net" for people who fall victim to global swings. They wish to draw attention to the fact that this "safety net" has diminished in great measure during the last decade. Rather than leave people to passively suffer their fate, ICSW and ICVA support structures which empower them and which break down traditional dependencies.

13. In a broad economic context, ICSW and ICVA wish to draw attention to the vast income disparities in the world today, not only between nations (150:1) but also within nations: the gap between rich and poor has widened during the last decade. The two Councils support more equitable market systems which do not keep developing countries in a situation of economic bondage. In addition, they support development projects aimed at permanent correction of such inequities and in harmony with social-improvement schemes developed in keeping with the needs of the local community as they themselves see them.

14. ICSW and ICVA, in solidarity with their members from developing countries, wish to express their support for schemes aimed at correcting such forms of economic injustice or paternalistic development. They promote greater autonomy of developing countries in world markets and systems aimed at correcting global economic disparities and in promoting self-reliance, equitable distribution and proper utilization of resources - both human and material - to create a sound base for the socio-economic and personal development of the poor.

15. The two Councils would like to make special mention of all core topics as themes that have an overwhelming impact in relation to the advancement of women. Women constitute half the world's population and produce two thirds of its labour, but they hold only 1 per cent of its property and continue to suffer particular disadvantages. ICSW and ICVA believe that, in order for any social policy to be effective, there is a vital need to examine gender roles, constraints and responsibilities within any given society, and then to harmonize these realities with the chosen path of action.

16. Consequently, ICSW and ICVA call for greater efforts to integrate women more fully into society as fully-fledged members with equal and acknowledged rights and involvement in decision-making processes. Both Councils call for greater steps to be taken to eliminate gender-based poverty and deprivation (the so-called "feminization of poverty"), it being common knowledge that the weight of poverty falls disproportionately upon women and the children they bring up. More households headed by women are poor; and poverty in turn diminishes one's chances for effective social integration. Increasing impoverishment, homelessness and marginalization among women has created a definite need for action in this direction. Moreover, given the particular problems women face in the labour market and concerning work-related benefits, ICSW and ICVA call for

greater efforts to be made to recognize and remunerate the productive activities of women, be they in or outside the home.

17. Both ICSW and ICVA promote the idea that social development should become the main task of the United Nations at this point in history - the reason being that there can be no world peace and security as long as poverty grows unchecked; and with the increasing sense of marginalization and frustration which results from it, ICSW and ICVA see such phenomena as the main cause of political instability at all levels; and, conversely, they believe that stability will increase when the basic needs of all people within a society are met and when their rights are guaranteed and their satisfaction ensured: real social integration will prevent the proliferation of ethnic and racial tensions, as well as other disintegrative tendencies, such as substance abuse or violent behaviour. ICSW and ICVA strongly reiterate their support to any and all United Nations initiatives in this direction.

Notes

1/ ICSW is an autonomous global body representing non-governmental organizations involved in issues of social welfare, social justice and social development. Its relevance is based on its absolute commitment to the interests of all people of the world in ensuring their quality of life and in acting upon issues of urgency which endanger their well-being. ICSW members are united in their commitment to global social justice and its many member organizations act together to promote these interests through advocacy, exchange, dissemination of information and support for sectors involved in social concerns.

2/ ICVA, established in 1962 and based in Geneva, Switzerland, brings together major international, regional and national non-governmental organizations active in humanitarian assistance and sustainable development. ICVA members mobilize about $2,500 million a year. ICVA's international members group more than 1,500 agencies in practically all countries of the world, while national umbrella members have an aggregate membership of over 2,500 institutions.